



"Raising up generations of religious and community leaders building a social movement to end poverty led by the poor."

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DIRECT ACTION WELFARE GROUP HOSTS SUCCESSFUL NATIONAL/INTERNATIONAL LEADERSHIP SCHOOL FOR GRASSROOTS ANTI-POVERTY LEADERS

Kanawha County, WV - One hundred and sixty community and religious leaders from over 20 anti-poverty organizations from around the country and the world, wrapped up their historic week-long leadership school at Camp Virgil Tate today. The school, which ran from August 9-15th, is a project of the Poverty Initiative based at Union Theological Seminary in New York City and was hosted locally by partner organizations Direct Action Welfare Group (DAWG) and Teen DAWG.

Today as record numbers of people lose their homes, their jobs, their health care and their retirement savings, the anti-poverty leaders came together to work toward reigniting Dr. Martin Luther King's vision of building a multi-racial Poor People's Campaign.

Throughout the week, participants in the school learned about the causes of the current economic crisis, Dr. King's 1968 Poor People's Campaign, new labor organizing, Economic Human Rights, creating their own media and the role of arts and religion in the movement to end poverty. Leaders at the school not only studied hard throughout the week, but also had the chance to share songs from their respective cultures around the campfire, worship together and enjoy a traditional West Virginia barbeque hosted by DAWG members.

Leaders at the school had the opportunity during the week to visit Kayford Mountain, where they learned about the social and environmental impact of mountain top removal. School participants also toured Matewan and the West Virginia State Museum with guide and local historian Wess Harris. Harris, publisher of the book *When Miners March* by William C. Blizzard, shared the history of the coal wars of 1920-1921. In learning about the coal miners' struggles to organize, Leadership School participants gained many lessons they will take back to their current-day struggles for housing, health care, education, living wage jobs and other economic human rights. The lessons learned will also be a key element as the group works to reignite Dr. King's Poor People's Campaign.

Leaders at the school will bring many lessons back with them this week as they return to their local anti-poverty work around the country and the world. Martin Johnstone, of the Church of Scotland explained, "We are taking back to Scotland the passion for change we have experienced in the Leadership School. We leave committed to struggle together for a better world. For that to be possible the wisdom of people in poverty must not only be heard it must be acted upon."

Pastor Amanda Gayle Reed of the First Welch and Court Street Churches, United Methodist Churches in McDowell County, also participated in this week's school and shared her experience, "It has been wonderful to meet all of the different people and hear about the work of all the different organizations. The leaders I have met here will be good contacts for future programs I might want to start here in the future." She added, "It was also great having all of the international representatives here in West Virginia!"

Luis Larin of United Workers in Baltimore, MD spoke through a Spanish translator saying, "We will be bringing back a lot of energy for justice from this School, and a lot of desire to keep fighting until we win. Another society is possible to achieve where all people are guaranteed their Economic Human Rights."

Another of the international participants, Rev. Mavuso of the Shackdwellers movement in South Africa said at the school he had been reminded, "that Rev. Dr. Martin Luther King, who is a great church leader, was fighting against poverty, racial discrimination and any form of injustice and that he died for that cause. Dr. King meant to pursue this cause through a commitment to non-violence, and our campaigns should be like his, even in South Africa."

At least 25 youth leaders also took part in the week-long school. Zakia Royster of the Philadelphia Student Union said she learned that "you have to keep fighting and have diligence and at the end you will reap what you sow."

Beth Dortch, Coordinator of the local group Teen DAWG, said she would be taking back with her all of the connections made with people here. "I will also share what I learned in the media track with our teens on how to make documentaries, use flip cameras and the editing process so that we can make a film about people's lives in our community." Beth also said about the school ending today, "I'm really going to miss everybody!"

Leadership School participants ended the week with a graduation ceremony on Friday evening and a final planning session on next steps for the national network on Saturday morning before heading home Saturday afternoon.

Photos, blog entries, video and audio recordings documenting the historic leadership school can now be found at <http://pileadershipschool.wordpress.com>.

The Direct Action Welfare Group Inc. (DAWG) is a statewide organization comprised of public assistance recipients, low-wage workers, and people in poverty. DAWG's vision is the end of poverty in West Virginia. In order to make this vision a reality, DAWG advocates *with* low-income families for economic justice. For more information, visit www.wvdawg.org.

The Poverty Initiative, based at Union Theological Seminary in New York City, has a mission to raise up generations of religious and community leaders dedicated to building a social movement to end poverty, led by the poor. For more information, visit www.povertyinitiative.org.